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SUBJECT: NOVEMBER 6 MEETING WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVE HIND EL-KHOURY

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Salam Fayyad will visit Paris during the week of November 9 for meetings with PM Fillon and FM Kouchner, according to PLO Representative Hind el-Khoury. She noted that the Palestinian delegation was "very pleased" with the results of the November 3-4 Mediterranean Union meeting in Marseille, in particular the reference to the Arab peace initiative that was included in the ministers' declaration. She noted that she has been admonished by the MFA for her activism on the case of French national Salah al-Hammouri, an East Jerusalem resident serving a seven-year sentence in an Israeli prison. Ludovic Pouille, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant, recently shared the MFA perspective on al-Hammouri's case; see paragraph 7. End summary.

¶2. (C) PolMinC and NEA Watcher met November 6 with PLO Representative Hind el-Khoury and her political advisor, Taghreed Senouara. The two PLO representatives offered effusive and extended congratulations on the results of the U.S. presidential election, stressing that the U.S. was fortunate to have elected so charismatic a figure at such a challenging time. Turning at last to Near Eastern affairs, El-Khoury mentioned that PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad will visit Paris the week of November 9, during which time he will meet with PM Fillon and FM Kouchner. In addition, El-Khoury will host a breakfast for Fayyad with selected journalists, and a dinner with Arab ambassadors.

Palestinian Reconciliation/Peace Process

¶3. (C) El-Khoury offered a few thoughts about internal Palestinian politics, beginning with the premise that the last few years have ripped apart the socio-economic tissue of Palestinian daily life. She castigated Fatah for its "lack of vision" and its inability to bring fifteen years of negotiation and compromise to a positive conclusion, an inability upon which Hamas had been able to capitalize. She predicted that a continuation of the status quo would allow Hamas -- which has drawn strength from Hizballah's perceived success in 2006 -- to win handily the 2010 Palestinian parliamentary elections. "Abu Mazen (i.e., Abbas) needs evidence that the political process is working," she said, because the Palestinian electorate feels it is not.

¶4. (C) El-Khoury herself was not optimistic about the prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace in the short-term, and though she is no friend to Hamas or its ideology, she claimed that non-violent resistance had proven to be a "Catch-22." "We live in a lose-lose situation, whether we follow non-violence or violence. When we use non-violent resistance, the settlers shoot at Palestinian farmers with impunity," she lamented. Declaring that the real problem was the lack of political will (to conclude a peace agreement) in Israel, she questioned whether Foreign Minister Livni, even in the event that she wins the February 2009 elections, would

be able to form a government that is prepared to move forward on the peace process in a meaningful way. She suggested that the US and the EU would need to help the Israelis muster the political will to press forward, adding that the ultimate parameters of a peace accord were to be found in the Arab initiative, which provided a "win-win for everyone."

Mediterranean Union

¶5. (C) Speaking of the Arab initiative, el-Khoury observed that the Israeli delegation to the November 3-4 meeting of Mediterranean Union (UfM) foreign ministers in Marseille had dropped -- "under pressure from everyone" -- its objections to mentioning the Arab initiative in the ministers' declaration. She specifically credited the EU delegations for finally taking a "cohesive" position on the Arab initiative reference and thereby budging the Israelis. "This was an excellent example of what third party pressure can do," said el-Khoury, who noted that the Palestinian delegation was "very pleased" with the meeting's outcome and guessed that the Israelis were as well. "Everyone gets what they want -- the Mediterranean Union is about normalization, which is what we all want," she said.

Salah al-Hammouri

¶6. (C) El-Khoury noted that her recent activism in France on behalf of Salah al-Hammouri, a French national and East Jerusalem resident serving time in an Israeli prison after pleading guilty to plotting the assassination of Rabbi Yosef

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Yosef, had earned her a slight admonishment from FM Kouchner's Middle East advisor, Christophe Bigot, who phoned her to ask what she thought she was doing. (Note: Al-Hammouri, whose mother is French, has become a minor cause celebre in France, where some have tried to draw a parallel between his case and that of kidnapped Franco-Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.) This slight chastisement seems not to have deterred her: El-Khoury termed al-Hammouri a "political prisoner" and added that, having raised two teenage sons in East Jerusalem, she was all too aware that young Palestinian men "are guilty the moment they put their noses outside." Without delving into the merits of al-Hammouri's case, she cited statistics to the effect that one third of the adult Palestinian population has seen the inside of an Israeli jail cell at some point. El-Khoury claimed that the "Free al-Hammouri" campaign was largely the work of the French "Solidarity Movement," which (she implied) seized upon his case in part because the movement had been befuddled by the split between Fatah and Hamas (and was presumably casting about for a cause). According to el-Khoury, the Solidarity Movement was in charge of planning and staging public events to call attention to al-Hammouri's case, and she merely offered advice and joined the occasional press conference. "Basically, it's a French movement," she said.

¶7. (C) According to Ludovic Pouille, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant, President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner have raised al-Hammouri's case with their Israeli counterparts to no avail. Although the French do not contest that al-Hammouri was a member of a PFLP cell at the time of his arrest in March 2005, they cite his youth and the fact that the plotters managed to do no more than walk by Rabbi Yosef's residence as grounds for leniency. Pouille said the French were frankly astonished in April 2008 when al-Hammouri, who had been held without trial for nearly three years, pled guilty upon the advice of his lawyer and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment; the French had expected him to be sentenced to time served. The case is complicated by the fact that since his sentencing, al-Hammouri has refused to write a letter appealing for clemency out of fear that the Israeli authorities might deport him to France. Without such an appeal, Israeli MFA officials have told Pouille that they have no basis for recommending that al-Hammouri's sentence be

commuted.

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